

Washington, DC - Last week Congressman John Barrow (GA-12), along with Congresswoman Mary Bono Mack (CA-45) and Congressman Joe Barton (TX-06), introduced the "Informed P2P User Act," (H.R. 7176), which will help make Internet users more aware of the inherent privacy and security risks associated with peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing programs.

"A lot of folks connect to these networks and don't realize that their most personal and private files could be looked at by anyone else on the network at any time," said Barrow.

"It's like they are posting their tax returns, financial records, and personal messages on the Internet, and they don't even know it.

This bill will let them know, in a way they can understand, that the information on their computers could be at risk."

Peer-to-peer (P2P) programs allow Internet users within the same networking program to connect with each other and directly access files from each other's computers. P2P software is also commonly used to introduce "spyware" or "adware" and can spread viruses, worms, and other malicious computer files. In addition, according to the organization "Stop Child Predators," peer-to-peer applications can be used as vehicles for distribution of illegal child pornography. While the very availability of such content on these systems is in itself abhorrent, even worse is that these files are often deliberately labeled with seemingly benign titles such as "Pokémon," "Hannah Montana" and others that appeal to children.

H.R. 7176 will:

- Ensure that P2P file sharing programs can't be installed without clear notice and consent of the authorized computer user.
- Make it unlawful to prevent the authorized user of a computer to prevent reasonable efforts to: 1) block the installation of a peer-to-peer file sharing program, and 2) disable or remove any peer-to-peer file sharing program.
- Give the Federal Trade Commission (FCC) authority to enforce this legislation.

“We commend Representatives Mary Bono Mack and John Barrow for recognizing that peer-to-peer file-sharing applications make it dangerously easy to expose children to child pornography, and use them as unwitting distributors of the same. This legislation will put into place appropriate safeguards to help curb the dissemination of child pornography,” said Stacie Rumenap, Executive Director of Stop Child Predators.

The perceived anonymity afforded by peer-to-peer networks can lead pedophiles to believe they can indulge their perverse fantasies with impunity. In a hearing last year before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, the chairman of a popular peer-to-peer application admitted that “P2P networks are plagued by child pornography.”

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